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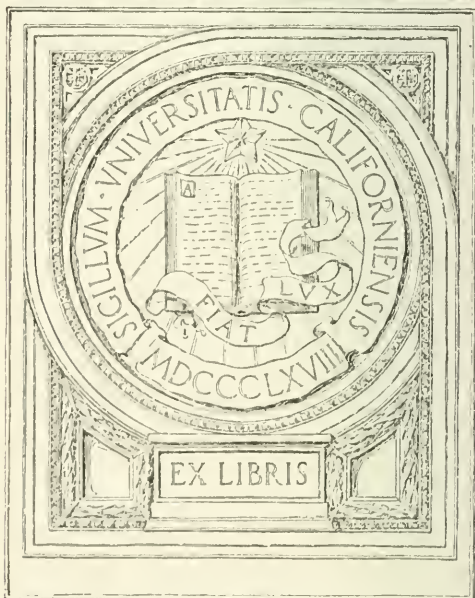
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Vignettes

Vignettes

A Miniature Journal of
Whim and Sentiment

By Hubert Crackanthorpe

John Lane
The Bodley Head
London and New York

1896

The pursuit of experience is the refuge of the unimaginative.

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Vignettes

I

ON the roof of the ruined church we lay, basking amid the hot, powdery heather; the cinder-coloured roofs of the town flattened out beneath us—a ragged patch of dead, decayed colour, burnt, as it seemed, out of the rank, luscious green of the Rhône valley. Overhead, a thick, blue sky hung heavy, and away and away, into the steamy haze of mid-day heat, filtered the Tarascon road, a streak of dazzling white. To the east, the sun was beating on the sandy slopes; to the west, the old Papal palace, like a great, grey, sleeping beast, lifted its long, bare back above the roofs of Avignon.

The lizards scurried from cranny to cranny across the crumbling wall. Below, in the cloister, a cat was curled by a black stack of brushwood. The little *place* stood empty, and stillness seemed to have fallen over all things.

The warmth lulled one to a de-

AT VILLE-
NEUVE-
LÈS
AVIGNON

April 23

AT VILLE-
NEUVE-
LÈS
AVIGNON

licious torpor. I was thinking of the bustling Regent Street pavement, of the rumble of Piccadilly, of newsboys yelling special editions in the Strand, drowsily conjuring up these and other commonplace contrasts.

Then Jeanne-Marie Latou began to speak. She sat between us, with her legs hunched under her coarse, colourless skirt, and some stray wisps of hair looking dingily yellow against the clean white of her *coiffe*. As she talked, her brown skin puckered oddly about her tiny, shrunken eyes, and her hands—browned also and squat—clasped themselves around her knees. It was not often that Jeanne-Marie Latou spoke French; her vocabulary was quite simple and limited, and every now and then, with an impatient shake of her head, she would break out into *patois*.

She was telling us of her nephew in Tunis—"Un pays où on ne voit que des sauvages"—and of the sweetheart

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he had left behind at Barbentane; repeating by heart, one after another, his queer, bald, little letters—how he had been kicked by his horse (he was a *spahi*; “*zouave à cheval*,” she called it), and had been sick ten days in the hospital; and how, without telling anyone, she had scraped together a hundred sous to send out to him. Somehow, irresistibly, while she chattered, I seemed to see that soldier nephew of hers—broad and straight and bronzed, his fez stuck jauntily on the back of his head, noisily *noçant avec des camarades* with those hundred sous, which old Tante Latou had sent out to him.

By-and-bye, she related her journey to Valence, in the time when she had worked as a cherry-packer for Madame Charbonnier in the Rue Joseph-Vernet, insisting with comical, energetic wrinklins of her forehead on her contempt for the *jargon de l'Ardèche*. . . . She had been to

AT VILLE-
NEUVE
LÈS
AVIGNON

AT VILLE-
NEUVE-
LÈS
AVIGNON

Marseilles, too, last year—that was a great journey—eighteen of them had gone from Villeneuve, “*femmes et filles et trois garçons, dans un train ‘ambulant’—quatre francs et douze sous, aller et retour Marseilles, vous savez,*” Jeanne-Marie Latou reiterated, “*c’est quelque chose c’est quelque chose c’est quelque chose enfin, c’est la plus jolie ville que j’ai trouvée.*”

Afterwards, starting to recall by-gone times, she described the breaking up of the *Chartreuse* in *quatre-vingt douze*, and the selling of the whole building by auction in the little *place*, there, below us (not for money—no one in the *pays* had any money in those days—but for *assignats*), and, Jeanne-Marie Latou explained, “*Ceux qui avaient peur n’en prenaient pas, et ceux qui n’avaient pas peur en prenaient.*” And her father, who had been a stone-worker, over there at Les Angles, had bid *douze cents francs*

d'assignats for the house where the *supérieure* had lived—*douze cents francs d'assignats* which no one had ever asked him to pay. There Jeanne-Marie Latour had always lived—seventy-seven years, it was now, as near as she could remember—she, and her husband who had been dead these twenty-three years. She could remember the time when the frescoes on the cloister walls were bright and beautiful, and no grass grew between the flags. Yes, she had seen all the other houses pass from family to family; there were six of them now who had the right to use the old church as a barn, “*ma foi, elle est bien grande, l’église,*” Jeanne-Marie Latou concluded, smiling knowingly at us, “*Mais, quand même, ils se chicanent toujours.*” . . .

And with that, she rose slowly and bid us good-bye, and wished us good health, toddling grotesquely away down the steps.

AT VILLE-
NEUVE-
LÈS
AVIGNON

AT VILLE-
NEUVE-
LÈS
AVIGNON

After she had gone, we stayed a long while up on the hot roof, watching the dark shadows creep from under the broken bridge across the rippling Rhône, as it swept past towards the sea. And I wondered more drowsily than ever concerning old Jeanne-Marie Latou, and her soldier nephew, with the *spahis*, away over there in Tunis, and that great journey of hers to Marscilles—eighteen of them from the dead little town below, “*femmes et filles et trois garçons, dans un train ‘ambulant’— quatre francs et douze sous, aller et retour.*”

ASCEN-
SION DAY
AT ARLES

THE population pours out from mass, flooding every crooked street—rubicund peasants in starched Sunday blouses; olive-skinned, Greek-featured *Arlésiennes* in quaint, lace head-dresses; strutting *petits messieurs*

Vignettes

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en chapeau rond and tight-fitting *com-plets*; shouting shoals of boys; zouaves, indolent and superb, in flowing red knickerbockers, white spats, and jauntily-poised fez.

ASCEN-
SION DAY
AT ARLES

A bleating of lambs, plaintive, incessant and dirge-like, fills the *Place du Forum*; heaped over the gravel they lie, their legs tied under their bellies, and their skinny necks helplessly outstretched: and beyond, the great, green umbrellas of a regiment of wrinkled beldams—fruit-sellers encamped in rows before their baskets.

. . . . A strange complication of odours—of cheese, of fish and of flowers—floats in the air: at every alley-corner some auctioneer stands posted—shouting, perspiring vendors of knives, pocket-books, glass-cutters, chromo-lithographs, cement, songs, *sabots*. An old top-hatted Jew nasally vaunts a wine-testing fluid, and tells horrible and interminable tales of vintages manufactured from decayed dates,

ASCEN-
SION DAY
AT ARLES

from vinegar and sugar, or from plaster-of-Paris ; a travelling pedicure operates on the box-seat of a gorgeously-painted van, to the accompaniment of a big drum and clashing cymbals ; the inevitable strong man defiantly challenges the crowd to split a flag-stone across his bare, hirsute chest ; and a blind-folded fortune-telling wench chaunts with mechanical shamelessness the young men's amorous indiscretions.

Outside the town, the boulevard is gay with the glitter of pedlars' wares, and flapping, gaudy stuffs, red, green and yellow and blue ; travelling showmen are bustling with final preparations, hammering together their skeleton booths, or unfolding gaunt rolls of battered canvas ; the steam-orchestra of a *Grand Musée fin de siècle* bellows from its rows of brass-mouthed trumpets a deafening, wheezy tune ; and everywhere, beneath the tunnel of pale green plane-trees, a thick, drifting tide of men and women.

OF a sudden it seems to have come —the poplars fluttering their golden green; the fruit-trees tricked out in fête-day frocks of frail snow-white; the hoary oaks uncurling their baby leaves; and the lanes all littered with golden broom. . . .

The blue flax sways like a sensitive sea; the violets peep from amid the moss; beneath every hedgerow the primroses cluster; and the rivulets tinkle their shrill, glad songs. . . .

Dense levies of orchises empurple the meadows, where the butterflies hasten their wavering flight; the sunlight breathes through the pale-leafed woods; and the air is sweet with the scent of the spring, and loud with the humming of wings. . . .

.
It lasts but a week—a fleeting mood of dainty gaiety; a quick discarding of the brown shabbiness of winter for a smiling array of white and gold, fresh-green, and turquoise-blue. . . .

SPRING
IN
BÉARN

May 1

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SPRING IN BÉARN	<p>And then, it has flitted, and through the long, parched months relentlessly blazes the summer sun.</p>
IN THE LONG GRASS May 13	<p>A MYSTERIOUS, impenetrable jungle of green stems, quivering with the play of a myriad baby shadows. A close crowd of flowers—naïve-faced, white-cheeked daisies; buttercups, glistening gold; dandelions like ragged medallions; stubbly bearded thistles; sleek-stalked orchises, white, and mauve, and purple; corpulent, heavy-leafed clover, and skinny ragged robin. And, topping them all, the languidly nodding heads of a thousand seeded grasses, and the dishevelled crests of the red sorrel. . . .</p> <p>A ceaseless humming of wings—deep-toned and solemn, cheerily bustling, high-pitched and idle. . . .</p> <p>Hidden in the green-stemmed jun-</p>

Vignettes

I I

gle, a world of creatures silently busy—hurrying ants; heavy, gray cockchafers, drowsily lumbering; tiny, red spiders, fidgeting from blade to blade; grasshoppers, with their great sensitive eyes, humanly expressive; shiny, black beasts, wriggling their scuttling bodies; fierce-looking flying things, their vivid red bodies, now poised motionless, now darting capriciously to and fro.

IN THE
LONG
GRASS

One after another they come for a peep at me. A pair of blue-bottles, chasing one another, dash past; a furry bee chaunts lustily as he bustles from flower to flower; and dark, evil-looking flies hover, hanging their long, sneaking legs. . . .

I WENT there again to-day; but I did not see her. It is a year now since I met her, sitting alone before her basket, in a corner of the deserted square. Her face was tanned

PAU

May 14

PAU

deep russet, and wrinkled to a tragic listlessness; she had eyebrows white as clean linen, and full-veined, tremulous hands. When I first spoke to her, I did not know that she was blind. She pulled some handkerchiefs from her basket, and offered them to me in a quavering, far-away voice, explaining that she had hemmed them herself; for she had been brought up as a *couturière*. I asked her how long she had been blind:—

“It is forty-eight years since I saw anything, *monsieur*. When I was young I had a great trouble. . . . For eighteen months I wept, and when I went back to work, my eyes were worn out, and I could see no more. . . . It is forty-eight years now, *monsieur*, since I saw anything. . . . *Heureusement, il n’y en a plus pour longtemps . . . ce sera bientôt fini. . . .*”

She spoke simply, and with quiet dignity; though I could see that she

Vignettes

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was crying a little, as she fingered her handkerchiefs with her full-veined, tremulous hands.

PAU

FROM afar off, high against the sky, we could see the ragged line of its roofs, like an ancient, tattered crest along the back of a precipitous, inaccessible-looking hill.

CASTEL-
SARRA-
SIN

May 17

To reach it we waded the Luys de France, with the water swishing under our horses' bellies, and climbed a mule-track, tight-paved with cobbles, waywardly winding beneath the contorted limbs of leafy, Spanish chestnuts. The track led us around the outside of the village, close under the shadow of its houses—discoloured-yellow and musty-white, fissured and bestained, battered and starved, till everywhere their bones protruded, bulging, bursting beams.

Low, sloping roofs, moss-grown,

CASTEL-
SARRA-
SIN

the colour of old gold, over-lapped the walls, like huge, ill-fitting caps; shading row upon row of wooden balconies, filled with a decrepid multitude of things, which, it seemed, could never have been new—broken earthenware pots; ricketty rush-bottomed chairs; strips of old linen; worn-out bass brooms; stacks of dead branches. . . .

Two geese, a yellow dog, and a little black pig had the village street all to themselves. The clock on the tower of the whitewashed church pointed half-past ten, though the twilight had not yet come. And our horses' hoofs clattered, almost brutally, past the dank-smelling, mud-floored rooms, and the cracked, worm-eaten shutters, wearily moaning with the dull fatigue of stiff-jointed old age.

Toiling up the hill, on the other side, we met a crooked old woman, barefooted, clad in a single frayed

shirt, carrying a truss of sainfoin on her head.

“*Adechats*,” she mumbled mechanically, and toiled on barefooted up the stony path, steadying the truss of sainfoin with both hands. . . .

CASTEL-
SARRA-
SIN

ALL day an intense impression of lusty sunlight, of quivering golden-green a long, white road that dazzles, between its rustling dark-green walls; blue brawling rivers; swelling upland meadows, flower-thronged, luscious with tall, cool grass; the shepherd's thin-toned pipe; the ragged flocks, blocking the road, cropping at the hedge-rows as they hurry on towards the mountains; the slow, straining teams of jangling mules—wine-carriers coming from Spain; through dank, cobbled village streets, where the pigs pant

IN THE
BASQUE
COUNTRY

May 23

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<p>IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY</p>	<p>their bellies in the roadway, and the sandal-makers flatten the hemp before their doors ; and then, out again into the lusty sunlight, along the straight, powdery road that dazzles ahead interminably towards a mysterious, hazy horizon, where the land melts into the sky. . . .</p> <p>And, at last, the cool evening scents ; soft shadows stealing beneath the still, silent oaks ; and, all at once, a sight of the great snow-mountains, vague, phantasmagoric, like a mirage in the sky ; and of the hills, all indigo, rippling towards a pale sunset of liquid gold.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">.</p>
<p>IN THE LANDES</p> <p>May 27</p>	<p>SINCE sunrise I had been travelling—along the straight-stretching roads, white with summer sand, interminably striped by the shadows of the poplars ; across the great,</p>

parched plain, where, all the day's length, the heat dances over the waste land, and the cattle bells float their far-away tinkling; through the desolate villages, empty but for the beldames, hunched in the doorways, pulling the flax with horny, tremulous fingers; and on towards the desolate silence of the flowerless pine-forests. . . .

And there the night fell. The sun went down unseen; a dim flickering ruddled the host of tree trunks; and the darkness started to drift through the forest. The road grew narrow as a footpath, and the mare slackening her pace, uneasily strained her white neck ahead.

Out of the darkness a figure sprang beside me. A shout rang out—words of an uncouth *patois* that I did not understand. And the mare, terrified, galloped forward, snorting, and swerving from side to side. . . .

And a strange, superstitious fear

IN THE
LANDES

crept over me—a dreamy dread of the future; a helpless presentiment of evil days to come; a sense, too, of the ruthless nullity of life, of the futile deception of effort, of bitter revolt against the extinction of death, a yearning after faith in a vague survival beyond. . . .

And the words of the old proverb returned to me mockingly:—

“The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear with hearing.”

CETTE

June 5,
Midday

A PURE stretch of sky; a flatsweep of sea; cobalt-blue, rich and opaque, pervading all things. In the harbour, battered, blue-painted barges, their decks loaded with oranges; barge-men in blue blouses, asleep across the glaring pavement; and along the quay, indefinitely, as far as the eye can reach, row upon row of barrels, repeating from their up-turned ends the same

Vignettes	19
<p>stifling note of colour. . . . The sea licks the jetty wall, lazily, rhythmically: everywhere a sensation of listless oppression, of lifeless torpor. . . .</p>	CETTE
<p>I HAVE sat there, and seen the winter days finish their short-spanned lives, and all the globes of light, crimson, emerald, and pallid yellow, start, one by one, out of the russet fog that creeps up the river.</p> <p>But I like the place best on these hot summer nights, when the sky hangs thick with stifled colour, and the stars shine small and shyly. For then the pulse of the city is hushed, and the scales of the water flicker golden and oily under the watching regiment of lamps. The bridge clasps its gaunt arms tight from bank to bank, and the shuffle of a retreating</p>	<p>ON CHELSEA EMBANK- MENT</p> <p>June 26</p>

ON
CHELSEA
EMBANK-
MENT

figure sounds loud and alone in the quiet. . . .

There, if you wait long enough, you may hear the long wail of the siren, that seems to tell of the anguish of London, till a train hurries to throttle its dying note, roaring and rushing, thundering and blazing through the night, tossing its white crest of smoke, charging across the bridge, into the dark country beyond. . . .

PLEA-
SANT
COURT

June 28

IT is known only to the inhabitants of the quarter. To find it, you must penetrate a winding passage, wedged between high walls of dismal brick. Turn to the right by the blue-lettered advertisement of Kop's Ale, and again to the left through the two posts, and you come to Pleasant-court. And when you are

there, you can go no farther; for at the far end there is no way out.

PLEA-
SANT
COURT

There are thirteen houses in Pleasant-court—seven on the one side, and six on the other. They are alike, every one; low-walled as country cottages; built of blackish brick, with a six-foot plot before each, and slate roofs that glimmer wanly on the wet, winter mornings.

But winter is not the season to see Pleasant-court at its best. The drain-sluice is always getting choked, so that pools of mud and brown water loiter near the rickety fence that flanks each six-foot enclosure; and, at Christmas-time, “most everyone is a bit out,” and young Hyams in the Walworth-road stacks half his back shop with furniture from Pleasant-court; and all day long the children of the lodger at No. 5 never stop squalling with chapped faces, and the “Lowser’s” wife makes much commotion at nights, threatening to “set-

PLEA-
SANT
COURT

tle" her husband, and sending her four children to clatter about the pavement.

In the summer, however, everyone smartens up, and by the time that sultry June days have come, Pleasant-court attempts a rural air. On the left-hand side a jaded creeper pushes its grimy greenery under the windows; some of the grass plots grow quite bushy with tough, wizened stalks; and the geranium pots at No. 7 strike flaming specks of vermilion.

Last March the "Lowser" and his wife and his four children moved over to Southwark; the lodger at No. 5 is in work again; and now the quiet of seclusion is restored to Pleasant-court.

The children sprawl the afternoon through on the hot alley floor; Mrs. Hodgkiss hangs her washing to bulge and flap across the court, like a line of white banners; and on the airless

evenings, the women, limp, with their straggling hair, and loose, bedraggled skirts, lean their bare, fleshy elbows over the fence, lingering to gossip before they go to dinner.

And on Saturday nights, the inhabitants of Pleasant-court troop out to join the rumble and the rattle of the Walworth-road, and to swell the life that shuffles down its pavement, past the flaring naphtha lights, the stall-keepers bawling in the gutter, and every shop ablaze with gross jets of gas.

PLEA-
SANT
COURT

THESE are their names—Carlotta, Lubella, Belinda, Aminata, Clarissa. By the old howling-green they stand, a little pompously perhaps, with a slight superfluity of dignity, conscious of their own full, comely contours—a courtly group of rotund dames. Heavy Carlotta, the

THE FIVE
SISTER
PANSIES

August 19

THE FIVE
SISTER
PANSIES

eldest, lover of blatant luxury, overblown, middle-aged, in her gown of rich magenta, all embroidered with tawdry gilt; Lubella, wearing portly velvet of dark purple, sensual, indolent, insolent as an empress of old, gleaming her thin, yellow eye; insignificant Belinda, bedecked in silly, sentimental mauve, all for dallying with the facile gossip of galanterie, gushing, giggling, gullible; unsophisticated Aminta, with tresses of flaming gold, amiable and obvious as a common stage heroine; and Clarissa, the youngest, slyly smirking the while, above her frock of milk-white innocence.

OUR
LADY OF
THE
LANE

Sept. 17

WHENEVER the London sun touches the small, dusky shops with a jumble of begrimed colour—the old gold and scarlet of hanging meat; the metallic green of

mature cabbages; the wavering russet of piled potatoes; the sharp white of fly-bills, pasted all awry—then the moment to see her is come. You will find her, bareheaded and touzled; her dingy, peaked shawl hanging down her back, and in front the bellying expanse of her soiled apron; blocking the pavement; established by her own corner of the Lane, all littered with the cries of children, and the fitful throbbing of the asphalt beneath the hollow hammering of hoofs.

She carries always a baby by her breast; her bare forearms are as bulky as any man's; in her eyes is a froward scowl; and, when she laughs, it is with a harsh, strident gaiety. But she never fails to wear her squalid portliness with a robust and defiant dignity, that makes her figure definitely symbolic of Cockney maternity.

OUR
LADY OF
THE
LANE

ON THE
COAST OF
CALVA-
DOS

Sept. 26

THE leaden sea plashed her indolent rhythm: all along the lonely shore the orchards stood motionless, sombre, metallic-looking in the lifeless, thunder-charged air; and amid a rugged flare of smoky flame, the sun went down in the West.

A baby breeze rustled past, fleeing before the distant storm: then, all grew still again, while, across the horizon, a quiet rift broke, revealing a long, lurid line of fantastic coast—mysterious, desolate valleys, and ragged towering cliffs.

The leaden sea plashed her indolent rhythm; and the bleak bulk of a steamer, pitching in the offing, moved like a beast in distress.

And once again, fresh and cool, carrying the scent of the storm, the breeze came fleeing, trailing an inky stain over the sea; and across the West there defiled a vague squadron of gigantic pillars of rain.

The parched trees swayed their

Vignettes

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boughs, uneasily whispering ; and, of a sudden, wrapping all things in a dense shroud of dark-grey mist, clattered the ponderous rain.

ON THE
COAST OF
CALVA-
DOS

And overhead, on, through the growing night, the white, jagged flashes of lightning, and the frenzied flight of the screaming wind, and the dull booming of thunder told of the great, distant battle of the clouds.

A MAUVE sky, all subtle ; a discreet rusticity, daintily modern, femininely delicate ; a whole finikin arrangement of trim trees, of rectangular orchards, of tiny, spruce houses, tall-roofed and pink-faced, with white shutters demurely closed. Here and there a prim farmyard ; a squat church-spire ; and bloused peasants jogging behind rotund white horses,

IN NOR-
MANDY

Sept. 30

IN NOR-
MANDY

along a straight and gleaming road. In all the landscape no trace of the slovenly profusion of the picturesque ; but rather a distinguished reticence of detail, fresh, coquettish, almost dapper.

PARIS IN
OCTOBER

October 4

PARIS in October—all white and a-glitter under a cold, sparkling sky, and the trees of the boulevards trembling their frail, russet leaves ; garish, petulant Paris ; complacently content with her sauntering crowds, her monotonous arrangements in pink and white and blue ; ever busied with her own publicity, her tiresome, obvious vice, and her parochial modernity coquetting with cosmopolitanism. . . .

STRIPS of ruddy earth: poplars flecked with gold, and vineyards with autumn red; the dark, sleek Saône; and beyond, the pale green plain, spacious and smooth, stretching away and away towards the blue haze that wraps the Côte d'Or, hesitating and soft as the lines of a woman's body.

The sun sets, trailing a wash of pale, watery gold; torn, inky clouds spatter the sky; sombre shadows fill the acacia-groves; and on, on, pounds the train, untiring, rhythmically throbbing.

"Tout paysage est un état d'âme."

OFTEN must Amiel, who lived his life on the shores of this great lake, have brooded over her moods. Deep-blue, she lies plunged in silent meditation; wrapped in the opal-tinted mists of evening, she

LA CÔTE
D'OR
FROM
THE
TRAIN

October 6

LAUSAN-
NE

October 7

LAUSAN-
NE

dreams the vague, glad dreams of fancy ; now she smiles, she laughs even, as little ripples, all gilded by the sun-rays, trip across her surface ; she has her grey days of gloom, and her dark days of despair : she has also her *jours de fête*, and her *jours de grande toilette*, under a sky heavy-loaded with blue : often, in the moonlight, she lies white, tranquil, statuesque, like a beautiful, sleeping woman : at times her humour is bewilderingly capricious ; the fleeting, furious rages of a spoilt child sweep across her ; or, ink-coloured, she sulks during long hours, sullenly wrathful.

OLD MAR-
SEILLES
AT
MIDDAY

October 10

UP every staircase-street—dark crevasses, pinched between tall, peeling cliffs ; along the quay, flaunting, tattered, brawling colours, sweating and swarming with noisy life—negroes, Chinamen, Arabs, Lascars,

Italians, Greeks—the angry hum of a thousand tongues and the clatter of straining mules. . . . At midday, when all the smooth stone pavement lies bathed in lusty sunshine, you may feel the pulse of old Marseilles quicken to fever-heat its turbulent throbbing. . . .

Across the sea, polished as a pool of molten metal, the Southern sun strews his golden highway; the frail forest of masts stiffens, congealed like a fine etched pattern; side by side lie the herds of steamers, silent, drowsy, vermilion-bellied beasts; and over there, to the left, high above the city, the slim silhouette of Notre-Dame de la Garde shows a glimmer of dusky gilt. . . .

Oh! for the crude crowd of blatant hues and the flood of fierce vitality that belong to old Marseilles at midday!

OLD MAR-
SEILLES
AT
MIDDAY

MONTE
CARLO

October 15

HIGH, beneath the lofty dome of sullen sky, like a great white globe of electric light, the full moon hangs; beyond the bay, the twinkling lights of Monaco are dropping long golden tears into the sea: no breath of breeze to sway the black drooping palms; only the full, solemn phrase of Gounod's "Ave Maria," slowly recurring to linger in the still, grave air of the night. . .

The moonbeams spangle with silver the twin minarets of the temple of Chance; and stately officials swing back its portals to meet the silent tide of worshippers that ceaselessly ebbs and flows, blackening the broad flight of marble steps.

Within, through the great marble vestibule, where the shuffle of feet rings hollow, they hurry to huddle around the bright green shrines of the goddess, to await, with tense, yellow faces, the unflagging tide of her relentless caprices.

Vignettes

33

I SAT on the terrace of the old palace, waiting for the coming of the rain-clouds. The sunshine was gone, and with it the city's witty sparkle; the sirocco's breath puffed warm and moist; and Florence, all ruddled and sullen, lay chaunting her ponderous notes of bronze.

Below, knee-deep in the yellow, straggling stream, a fisherman swayed his net, slowly straining the supple framework; and while I watched him, of a sudden, a fitful longing to see the place again laid hold of me—to see it, just as it had been last year, on that mellow September afternoon, all garnished with soft light, all fragrant with coquettish simplicity and pleasant, prosperous peace. And soon, as the sky darkened, and the rain-clouds—a sombre, swelling herd—gathered above the cypresses of San Miniato, I seemed to hear the organ's stately roll, and to perceive, through the obscurity of the half-darkened chapel,

AT THE
CERTOSA
DI VAL
D'EMA

October 20

AT THE
CERTOSA
DI VAL
D'EMA

a crowding circle of white-robed figures. The chaunt of the church bells beat the air: all else seemed stilled—love and the quickening joy of life—and with a sort of childish inconsequence, bred perhaps of the curious, literary habit, I fell to envying them a little—those tall, white-robed fathers—their miniature rows of monkish gardens, and their solitary pacings beneath the pale-lemon cloisters. . .

So I started to go there, rattling through the dust in the face of the coming storm. By the roadside, the grey olives matched the sky; all around, the vines hung delicately dying, drooping in tired curves their fragile garlands of pallid-gold leaves; and here and there peeped specks of scarlet, like lingering traces of some bygone *fête*.

But, before we had climbed the hill, the rain came—a deliberate prelude of monstrous drops; and a veil, as of grey gauze, blurred the white-

faced villas peopling the hill-sides, and changed the cypresses to dim, spiky sentinels. . . .

AT THE
CERTOSA
DI VAL
D'EMA

It was Brother Agostino who came to the gate, greeting me, so I fancied, with a quick smile of recognition; then, before the groups of noisy village youths and raffish, Florentine cabmen, who encumbered the corridor, his features dropped back to the patient vacancy of habitual fatigue.

Over the tiled floor of the cloister-court rattled the dance of the rain; the great well, over-grown with rank grass, wore a forlorn, decrepit air; and a musty scent, as of approaching decay, floated over the vast garden.

In the chapel, a band of blatant Americans joined us, listening complacently to Brother Agostino's perfunctory explanations concerning the frescoes, the stained-glass windows, the exquisite tomb of the monastery's founder.

And the place seemed all changed:

AT THE
CERTOSA
DI VAL
D'EMA

its fine distinction was gone: the old Certosa exposed to the hurried gaze of every passing tourist; and stern-faced Brother Agostino, footsore and weary, degraded to the *rôle* of a common, obsequious guide.

. . .

MORN-
ING AT
CASTEL-
LO

October 30

THE morning's breath tastes cool and clean. The distant hills seem yet asleep, tranquil and dark—a long, low, wavering wall. Above the plain floats a lingering, pearly film, and the air grows busy with a vague rumour of awakening life—the rumble of wheels, the cracking of whips, the plaintive whistling of far-off trains. . . .

On its way to Florence the early train swings by; hordes of brown-skinned, bare-footed children sprawl noisily along all the street; the men lean idly watching the ceaseless tale

of lean *barrocci*, lumbering, jolting over the crooked flags; and before every open doorway the women group their chairs, to sit at their straw-plaiting the long day through. . . .

Beyond, across the dusty-green of countless olives, you can see the glittering roofs of Florence, the *Duomo's* burly dome, and the pale outline of Giotto's tower; but it is rather the sense of old-world slowness, the continual accumulation of friendly, trivial incident, that makes the intimate charm of this suburban street

THE young moon hangs amid a steely sky; the land, empty and darkening, rolls like a billowing sea towards the Western orange glow; and high behind us the tall hill lifts Perugia's ragged silhouette.

Down the steep road they came—

MORN-
ING AT
CASTEL-
LO

IN THE
CAMPO
SANTO AT
PERUGIA

November 1

IN THE
CAMPO
SANTO AT
PERUGIA

grave *bourgeois*; bands of brown-faced youths, chewing thin cigars; aged peasant-women, with faded, wrinkled eyes; chattering country-girls, gaudy handkerchiefs around their hair; toddling children; uncouth men from the mountains, sullenly wrapped in fur-trimmed cloaks, while, posted in rows on either side, the crippled beggars offer their dusty hats, and whine for charity in the Virgin's name.

Before the red gate of the Campo Santo the crowd surges; within, every alley is black with the press of people. It is the day of the dead. To visit the dead all the town is come.

. . . The pale specks of a myriad, tiny lamps; the glow of garlands against the crowding slabs of snow-white marble, that mark the children's graves; the glitter of every small, spruce mortuary chapel; and the glad scent of freshly-scattered flowers. . . .

Vignettes

39

Death loses its squalor; and
becomes something demure,
sociable, almost gay. . . .

IN THE
CAMPO
SANTO AT
PERUGIA

UP the squalid, ill-paved street,
lumber the great landaus—
an interminable, toiling stream, carry-
ing home from the *corso* the morose,
sallow-faced ladies of the Neapolitan
nobility, and crushing on either side
the hedge of gaping hobbledo-
hoys that line the niggardly
pavement.

NAPLES
IN NO-
VEMBER

*Late after-
noon in the
Strada del
Chiaja*

November 9

HEAPED beneath us all Naples,
white and motionless in the
silent blaze of the midday sun; cir-
cling the bay, still and smooth and
blue as the sky above, a misty line
of white villages; dark, velvety sha-
dows draping the hills; on the hori-

*From
Posilipo*

Nov. 12

*From
Posilipo*

zon, rising abruptly, Capri's notched
silhouette—*tout semble suer la beauté—
la bonne et franche beauté criarde
des pays chauds européens.*

. . . .

*In the
Strada del
Porto*

Nov. 17

A STRIP of treacherous pavement
slimy with garbage; the wan
flicker of foul lanterns, vaguely re-
vealing the black shapes of sail-like
awnings above a network of mysteri-
ous masts; and the sodden, continu-
ous uproar of a reeking crowd—
hawkers of fruit, of fish, of assorted
cigar-ends—fiercely clamouring toge-
ther in the darkness. . . .

By-and-bye, through the obscu-
rity, peers the glossy vermilion of
piled capsicums, the scarlet sparkle
of bleeding pomegranates, and the
hard flashing of scattered, silvery
sardines. Here and there, behind
a chestnut-brazier that shoots long,

licking tongues of ruddy flame, the vacant, battered countenance of some aged crone ; or amid a frenzied crackling of whips the clattering passage of a team of trembling mules, straining at a lean-shafted, high-wheeled cart, passing across the street, to disappear, engulfed in cavernous blackness, beneath a noisome archway. Bands of sailors jostle their way down the alley, rudely rebuffing the obscene advances of slatternly women ; the night grows airless and stifling, under the dingy stars that speckle the black strip of sky overhead ; and the street comes to possess a satanic fascination, almost epic in its intensity. . . .

*In the
Strada del
Porto*

THE long line of lamps casts countless, trembling pillars of dusky gold into the sea: the night is full of stifled light—a pale, quivering

Moonlight

Nov. 29

Moonlight

suffusion of mysterious blue. The Castello d'Oro floats, black as ink, like a shapeless hulk; across the empty sky a solitary, ghostly cloud lies sleeping; somewhere, beyond the bay, the moonlight is dancing; and the rhythm of the sleek, rolling waves drowsily, lazily, rises and falls.

A boy and a girl lean together, watching the waves: some mandolines start a faint twanging; the distant rattle of a cab—then all is quiet; and the glow above Vesuvius, sullenly pulsing, alone breaks in upon the delicate serenity of the night. . . .

*At the
Theatre
Manzoni*

Nov. 26

I HAVE been to many first-nights there, for I have found a certain childish charm in the small, shabby, blue-and-white theatre, the tiers of minute boxes, close-packed with faces, the noisy Neapolitan pit, and the in-

evitable row of callow critics, sucking their pencil-stumps, each with his hat tight-jammed behind his head.

But especially there lingers in my mind the memory of a certain brief, mediæval drama, where a little flaxen-haired lady, wearing a low-cut dress of arsenic-green satin, passionately implored mercy of a curly-pated knight in a shirt of maroon-coloured velvet, for a great wrong she had done him. She wept piteously, poor little creature, tearing tremulously at her fluffy locks, and on her knees appealing to us all to help her. But the little knight kept his wooden gaze obdurately averted from her, till, exhausted, she sank dying on to a gilt-legged couch.

The actors were only marionettes. The little lady was somewhat obviously painted, and the little knight stood a trifle stiffly, as if suffering slightly from stage-fright. But the pit sat the scene out in breathless

*At the
Theatre
Manzoni*

*At the
Theatre
Manzoni*

silence, and the row of callow critics sucked their pencil-stumps with renewed vigour, and jammed their hats tighter behind their heads. For in some curious, inexplicable way the thing was quite moving—he was so brutal, the little curly-pated knight in his shirt of maroon-coloured velvet; and she, poor, sobbing, little flaxen-haired lady, pleaded so desperately. . . .

Once before, in my childhood, through a half-closed door, I saw a girl plead with that same tense fragility. She, too, had flaxen hair, and wore a low-necked dress of green satin; and he, the man, stood stiffly, turning his gaze away from her, obdurately. And each scene, as I now compose them, seems to contain a kindred underlying element of grotesque unreality.

. . . .

IT was an old mill. There were white columns of peeling plaster flanking the granary, and stacks of frowsy brushwood blocking the door. Part of it had fallen away; tall, rank grass grew between the rotting rafters of the roof; and remnants of battered frescoes, that had once adorned the walls of the upper rooms, were now spread bare to sun and wind and rain. And the meal-troughs were full of blossoming wild-flowers. Beside the mill stood a small, square Moorish house, roofed with lava, scowling with dirt; and beside the house, guarding a public well, was a gaunt crane of mouldering wood. Across the sleekly rippling mill-stream a ragged peasant family were ranged the length of a strip of powdery soil—the father, the mother, two sons, four daughters, and a toddling child—and beyond them stretched the great dead-grey expanse of roofless walls—the sun-dried corpse of the

POMPEII

Nov. 28

POMPEII

ruined Roman town. In the twilight the sea lay towards Capri the colour of yellow mud; and Vesuvius, turning a vague, velvety black, was trickling his smoky breath towards the bay.

There was a great immobility in the air—an immobility that seemed born of long ages: and, somehow, more than the ruined town itself—defaced by German tourists and uniformed guides—this corner of the country supplied a bitter sense of shortness of life, the impassive sloth of time. . . .

IN THE
BAY OF
SALERNO

Nov. 30

TO gaze across the black sweep of sea, out into the mystery of the night; to hear the restless waves slowly sighing through the darkness, as they beat the rocks a thousand feet beneath; to love a little so, with quiet pressure of hands,

and listlessly to ponder on strange meanings of life and love and death.

And so, amid a still serenity of dreamy sadness, to forget the mad turmoil of passion, to grow indifferent to all desire, and to wait, while the heart fills full of grave gratitude towards an unknown God.

And then, once more, to understand how life is but a little thing, and love but a passionate illusion, and to envy the sea her sighing
in the days when the end
shall have come.

THE entertainment draws to its close, for it is past four in the morning. In the hall, several of the oil-lamps have already sputtered out; the rest are burning with dull, bleary-eyed weariness. A score of unshaven Spaniards, close muffled in *capas* and lowering *sombreros*, sprawl in limp

IN THE
BAY OF
SALERNO

SEVILLE
DANCING
GIRLS

December 10

SEVILLE
DANCING
GIRLS

attitudes over the empty benches, and the circle of gaudy women that fill the stage sit listless, pasty-faced, somnolent.

And then, for the last time, the frenzy passes. The guitars start their sudden, bitter twanging, and the women their wild, rhythmical beating of hands.

Amid volleys of harsh, frenzied plaudits la Manolita dances, swaying her soft, girlish frame with a tense, exasperated restraint; supple as a serpent; coyly, subtly lascivious; languidly curling and uncurling her bare white arms.

Out in the cold night air, as I hasten home through the narrow, sleeping streets, her soft, girlish frame still sways before my eyes,
to the bitter twanging
of guitars.

TO ride alone beneath the stars, through the long indefinite hours of the night; to climb the slumbering mountain-hulks; to hear the dull roar of the river, toiling unwearied through the darkness below; to break, with a sudden clattering of hoofs, the gloomy stillness of distant village-streets, and on through the twilight that precedes the dawn, to journey, without flagging, high up against the sky, across a desolate, limitless plain.

To scout the future; to unlearn the past; and to brood vaguely, as the night broods. . . .

To elude desire; to disdain the thrill of hate; to forget the long aching of love, and to commune, in tender serenity, with the grave-eyed Spirit of Rest.

And then, while the night slinks away across the hills, to push on towards the sunrise; to watch the marshalling of ruddy heralds across

SUNRISE

SUNRISE the East, and at last to meet the
Great God's dazzling glory,
bursting in splendour across
the empty land.

OFF CAPE
TRAFAL-
GAR

December 18

WE paced the bridge together, chatting till his watch should be done. The dim, uneasy outline of the steamer's bows loomed before us; now and again we could feel her pulse quicken, her sinews tighten, as, like a living thing, she flinched from each lashing of the waves.

He was telling me tales of the yellow fever at Rio de Janeiro, of the crowd of vessels lying in the harbour without a soul on board, of six weeks he had spent in the hospital there, where twelve hundred fever-stricken creatures lay packed on the floor of a single ward, and the doctors dared only shout to the patients from behind a railed gangway.

Vignettes

51

And, while he still talked, up from the East crept the first flicker of the dawn, revealing flocks of ruddy-sailed smacks tossing off the Spanish shore ; then, slowly, the throng of black billows turned to reddish-green, and across the sky, from behind the African coast, poured a deep, blood-red stain. The mirage rose, lifting into space the low line of black hills, and the growing glow set a carpet of cloud ablaze, till it hung, stretched across the sky, like a vast awning of beaten, burnished copper.

OFF CAPE
TRAFAL-
GAR

I DREAMED of an age grown strangely picturesque—of the rich enfeebled by monotonous ease ; of the shivering poor clamouring nightly for justice ; of a helpless democracy, vast revolt of the ill-informed ; of priests striving to be rational ; of sentimental moralists

RÊVERIE
December 25

RÊVERIE

protecting iniquity; of middle-class princes; of sybaritic saints; of complacent and pompous politicians; of doctors hurrying the degeneration of the race; of artists discarding possibilities for limitations; of pressmen befooling a pretentious public; of critics refining upon the 'busman's methods; of inhabitants of Camberwell chattering of culture.

And I dreamed of this great, dreamy London of ours; of her myriad fleeting moods; of the charm of her portentous provinciality; and I awoke
all a-glad and hungering for
life. . . .

IN RICH-
MOND
PARK

IN the wan, lingering light of the winter afternoon, the park stood all deserted; sluggishly drowsing, so it seemed, with its spacious distances muffled in greyness; colourless, fabulous, blurred. One by one, through

Vignettes

53

the damp, misty air, loomed the tall, stark, lifeless, elms. Overhead there lowered a turbid sky, heavy-charged with an unclean yellow. And, amid the ruddy patches of dank and rotting bracken, the little mare picked her way noiselessly. The rumour of life seemed hushed; there was only the vague, listless rhythm of the creaking saddle. . . .

The daylight faded; a shroud of ghostly mist enveloped the earth, and up from the vaporous distance crept slowly the evening darkness. . . .

IT was New Year's eve. The old, old scene. A London night; a heavy-brown atmosphere splashed with liquid, golden lights; the bustling market-place of sin; a silent crowd of black figures drifting over a wet, flickering pavement.

IN RICH-
MOND
PARK

NEW
YEAR'S
EVE

December 31

NEW
YEAR'S
EVE

The slow, grave notes from a church tower took command of the night. The last one faded: the old year had slipped by. And then a woman laughed—a strident, level laugh; and there swept through all the crowd a mad, feverish tremor. The women ran one to the other, kissing, wildly welcoming the New Year in; and the men, shouting thickly, snatched at them as they ran. And the cabmen touted eagerly for fares.

Across the road, by a corner, a street missionary stood on a chair—an undersized, poorly clad man, with a wizened, bearded face.

. . . “Repent . . . repent . . . and save your souls to-night from the eternal torments of hell-fire.”

The women jostled him, pelted him with foul gibes; and one—a young girl—broke into a peal of hysterical laughter.

And I mused wonderingly on
the ugliness of sin.

Vignettes

55

A SULLEN glow throbs overhead: golden will-o'-wisps are threading their shadowy groupings of gaunt-limbed trees; and the dull, distant rumour of feverish London waits on the still, night air. The lights of Hyde Park corner blaze like some monster, gilded constellation, shaming the dingy stars; and across the East there flares a sky-sign—a gaudy, crimson arabesque. . . .

And all the air hangs draped in the mysterious, sumptuous splendour of a murky London night. . . .

IN ST.
JAMES'S
PARK

January 15

THE city disgorges.

All along the Strand, down the great, ebbing tide, the omnibuses, a congested press of gaudy craft, drift westwards, jostling and jamming their tall, loaded decks, with a clanking of chains, a rumble of lumbering wheels,

IN THE
STRAND

January 27

IN THE
STRAND

a thudding of quick-loosed brakes, a humming of hammering hoofs. . . .

The empty hansoms slink silently past; the street hawkers—a long row of dingy figures—line the pavement-edge; troops of frenzied newsboys dart yelling through the traffic; and here and there a sullen-faced woman struggles to stem the tide of men.

Somewhere, behind Pall Mall, unheeded the sun has set: the sky is powdered with crimson dust; one by one the shops gleam out, blazing their windows of burnished glass; the twilight throbs with a ceaseless shuffle of hurrying feet; and over all things hovers the spirit of London's grim unrest.

SUNDAY
AFTER-
NOON

February 20

IT was a little street, shabbily symmetrical—a double row of insignificant, dingy-brick houses. Muffled

Vignettes

57

in the dusk of the fading winter afternoon, it seemed sunk in squalid, listless slumber. In the distance a church-bell was tolling its joyless mechanical Sunday tale.

SUNDAY
AFTER-
NOON

A man stood in the roadway, droning the words of a hymn-tune. He was old and decayed and sluttish: he wore an ancient, baggy frock-coat, and, through the cracks in his boots, you could see the red flesh of his feet. His gait was starved and timid: the touch of the air was very bitter. And when he had finished his singing, he remained gazing up at the rows of lifeless windows, with a look of dull expectancy in his blood-shot, watery eyes.

THE English Midlands, sluggishly effluent, a massy profusion of well-upholstered undulations; Nor-

RÊVERIE

April 15

RÊVERIE

mandy, coquettish, almost dapper, in its discreet rusticity, its finnikin spruceness, its distinguished reticence of detail; the plains of Lombardy in midsummer, all glutted with luscious vegetation; Switzerland, tricked out in cheap sentimentality, in a catch-penny crudity of tone; Andalusia, savagely harsh, with its bitter, exasperated colouring. . . .

In every country there links a personality, and the contemplation of the memories of the lands where one has lived, of the books one has cherished, of the women one has loved, brings with it a strange sense of the incomprehensible promptings of caprice.

With the fluctuations of mood, Musset seems puerile or passionate; Amiel, lachrymose or exquisitely perceptive; Baudelaire, *macabre* or impassively statuesque; Pater, tortuous or infinitely dexterous; Meredith, irksome or gorgeously prismatic.

There are women whom we wor-

shipped years ago, who would certainly fail to move us to-day ; books that enthralled us in our childhood, which we hesitate to open again ; places we had read of with delight, and for that reason shrink from surveying.

RÊVERIE

.
And so to-night, beneath the lime-tree, by the dog-rose hedge, whilst the grass-hoppers scrape their ceaseless chorus, and the flies roam like specks of gold, and the fawn-coloured cattle stalk home from the pastures, I wonder dreamily how I have come to love so steadfastly the whole wayward grace of this country-side—the melancholy of its wide plains, burnt to dun colour by the Southern sun ; the desolate silence of those dark, endless pine forests that lie beyond ; the hesitating contours of wooded slopes ; the distant Pyrenees, a long, ragged, snow-capped wall ; the dazzling-white roads, stretching between

RÉVERIE

their tall, slim poplars, straight towards the horizon ; the tumble-down, white-faced villages, huddled on the hilltops ; their battered, sloping roofs, tilted all awry, like loose-fitting, peaked caps of faded-red tiles ; the farmyards, strewn with dingy ox-bedding, and littered with a decrepit multitude of objects, which, it seems, can never have been new—broken earthenware pots, rickety, rush-bottomed chairs, stacks of dead branches, still rustling their brown, winter leaves ; the slow-paced oxen ploughing the land ; the peasants, men, women, and children, swaying in line as they sow the maize, with the poultry pecking behind ; the jangling bells of the dilapidated, yellow-wheeled courier ; the market-days, the sea of blue *bérets*, the press of blue blouses, the incoherent waving of ox-goats, the bristling of curved horns, the shifting mass of sleek, fawn-coloured backs ; the narrow, ramshackle streets

of the town; the line of plane-trees on the *place d'armes*, beneath which groups of grave *bourgeois* are for ever pacing; and the Gave, spurting over the rocks, under the old Norman bridge. . . .

The sun slips behind a bank of inky cloud, slowly trailing its pale-green stain, and the old, penetrating charm of this tiny corner of the earth returns, and the old longing to bind myself to it, to have my place in its life, always, through the years to come. . . .

The oxen have gone their way along the road; the lengthy twilight shadows steal across the garden; from the church-spire up on the hill the Angelus rings out; quite near at hand a tree-frog starts piping his shrill, clear note, and the cockchafers their angry whirling; and then, of a sudden, the violet night has fallen,

RÊVERIE

RÊVERIE

wrapping all earth and sky in her
mysterious, impenetrable
blackness. . . .

. . . .

ENFAN-
TILLAGE

April 23

HAVE you never longed to
wander there, in that won-
derful cloudland beyond the sea,
where, like droves of monstrous cattle,
close-huddled and drowsy, they lie
the day through—the comely, milk-
white summer clouds, slow and sleek
and swelling; the quick-scudding
darkling clouds, tattered with travel-
ling across the sky; the mighty
thunder-clouds, violet and lowering;
the flocks of fluffy-white baby clouds;
and all the sun's great gaudy guard,
from the daintily gilded sunset spars
to the blood-red bands that frequent
the South?

Sometimes, at even-fall, when the
sea lies calm in her opal tints, you

may discern the distant lines of their strange, fantastic home, vague, phantasmagoric, like a mirage beyond the horizon.

Perhaps, after death, we may linger there, and watch them silently sail away towards the lands we have loved long ago ! . . .

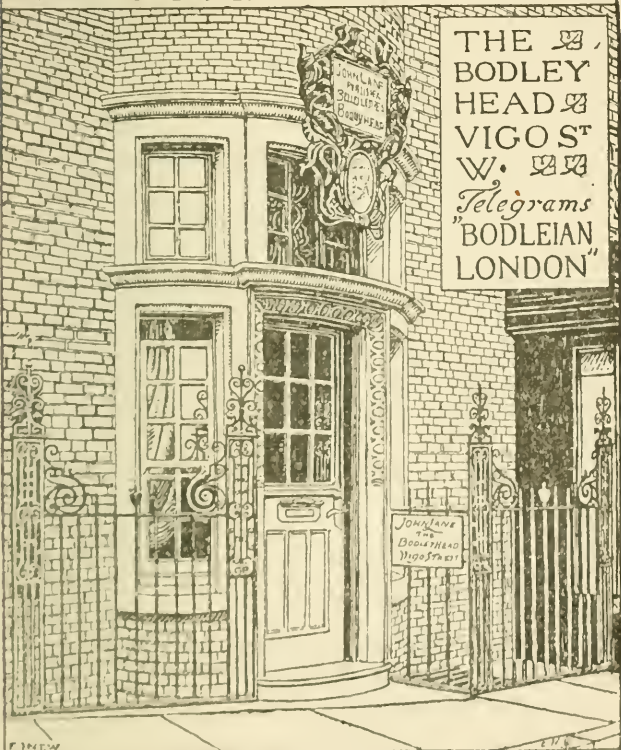
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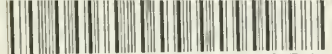
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